



CITY OF CHICAGO
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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Recommendation to Reopen Chicago Police Department Disciplinary Investigation

CPD Log #2022-0005027

OIG Case #C2024-0000000138

Published November 24, 2025

November 24, 2025

Pursuant to the Municipal Code of Chicago (MCC) § 2-56-230(c)(ii), the Public Safety section of the City of Chicago Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducts reviews of individual closed disciplinary investigations conducted by the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) and the Chicago Police Department's (CPD) Bureau of Internal Affairs (BIA). Based on those reviews, OIG may make a recommendation to reopen the investigation to address a deficiency materially affecting its outcome.

COPA investigated allegations that Officers Reynol Cuellar De La Cruz, Star #7661, and Denny Sanchez, Star #7759 detained the complainant and their passenger without justification, searched the complainant's vehicle without justification, failed to complete an Investigatory Stop Report (ISR) for a traffic stop that included a search, and failed to provide the complainant with an Investigatory Stop Receipt. COPA exonerated Officers De La Cruz and Sanchez on the allegation of unjustified detainment and sustained the allegations that they failed to complete an ISR, failed to provide an ISR receipt, and searched the vehicle without justification. COPA recommended a three-day suspension for Officers De La Cruz and Sanchez.

Officers Cuellar De La Cruz and Sanchez conducted a traffic stop of the complainant. During the traffic stop, the complainant requested a supervisor and Sergeant John Hanlon, Employee #115870, responded to the scene. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz informed Sergeant Hanlon that the complainant did not want to exit the vehicle and seemed nervous. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz stated to Sergeant Hanlon that the complainant provided specific inconsistent individuals regarding the owner of the vehicle as the reason why Officer Cuellar De La Cruz asked the complainant to exit their vehicle.

During its review of the body worn camera (BWC) footage, OIG found that Officer Cuellar De La Cruz never asked the complainant about the owner of the vehicle, nor did the complainant ever identify any owner of the vehicle prior to Officer Cuellar De La Cruz asking them to step out of the vehicle and searching the vehicle.

OIG recommended that COPA reopen the investigation to address Officer Cuellar De La Cruz's false statements made to Sergeant Hanlon and whether those statements constituted a Rule 14 violation.

In response to OIG's recommendations, COPA agreed to reopen the investigation. COPA served two Rule 14 allegations related to Officer Cuellar De La Cruz's statements to Sergeant Hanlon and conducted a second interview. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz admitted that they never asked the complainant about the vehicle's ownership before searching the vehicle and stated that their statements to Sergeant Hanlon were the result of poor phrasing and choice of words. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz stated that they made assumptions from the evidence and relayed those assumptions to Sergeant Hanlon. COPA sustained the Rule 14 allegations against Officer Cuellar De La Cruz, finding that their statements to Sergeant Hanlon were false, willful, and material. COPA recommended that Officer Cuellar De La Cruz be separated from the Department.

OIG's letter to COPA containing its recommendations is attached in Appendix A. COPA's response is attached as Appendix B.

Appendix A | OIG Letter



Deborah Witzburg | Inspector General
City of Chicago
Office of Inspector General
740 N. Sedgwick St., Ste 200
Chicago, IL 60654
Phone: (773) 478-7799

Via Electronic Mail

June 18, 2024

ANDREA KERSTEN
CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
CIVILIAN OFFICE OF POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY
1615 WEST CHICAGO AVENUE, 4TH FLOOR
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60622

Re: Log #2022-0005027

Dear Chief Administrator Kersten:

Pursuant to § 2-56-230(c)(ii) of the Municipal Code of Chicago (MCC), the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) Public Safety section has conducted a preliminary review of the investigation conducted by the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) in Log #2022-0005027. OIG recommends that the investigation be reopened to address all potential allegations. The investigation is currently in a Command Channel Review status .

Log #2022-0005027 concerns allegations that Chicago Police Department (CPD) Officer Reynol Cuellar De La Cruz, Star #7661, and Officer Denny Sanchez, Star #7759, detained the complainant and their associate without justification, searched the complainant's vehicle without justification, failed to complete an Investigatory Stop Report (ISR) for a traffic stop that included a search, and failed to provide the complainant with an Investigatory Stop Receipt. COPA reached a finding of Exonerated on the allegation of unjustified detainment. COPA sustained the allegations that the accused CPD members failed to complete an ISR, failed to provide an ISR receipt, and searched the vehicle without justification. COPA recommended a three-day suspension for both members.¹

On November 18, 2022, the Officers conducted a traffic stop of the complainant due to a broken taillight.² A review of Body Worn Camera (BWC) footage shows Officer Cuellar De La Cruz ask the complainant, who was the driver, for their license and insurance. At the 2:45 mark of Officer Cuellar De La Cruz's BWC footage, the complainant, while pulling their insurance information up on their cellphone, says, "I knew I should have drove my own damn car. I knew I should have drove my damn car."³ Officer Cuellar De La Cruz asks the passenger for their identification, which the passenger hands to Officer Sanchez. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz hands the complainant's license to Officer Sanchez, who conducted a name check on both individuals using a Portable Data Terminal (PDT). Officer Cuellar De La Cruz remains standing by the vehicle and does not ask the

¹ Attachment 47.

² Ibid.

³ Attachment 2.

complainant or passenger any questions during this time. During this time, the complainant states that they have to pick up their son from school, and there is a debate about rap music initially amongst the complainant and passenger, with Officer Cuellar De La Cruz joining in. Nothing is said about the owner of the vehicle.

Additional CPD members then arrived on the scene. The name check revealed that the passenger had a non-extraditable active arrest warrant. Subsequently, at the 7:34 mark, Officer Cuellar De La Cruz orders the complainant and their passenger to exit the vehicle. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz asks the complainant, "Is there anything in the car that I need to know before I take you out?" The complainant states, "this [is] not my car, but as far as I know, no, there's nothing in the car." Officer Cuellar De La Cruz directs the complainant out of the car. Both the complainant and passenger are handcuffed and escorted to the back of the vehicle. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz again asks the complainant whether there is anything on the complainant or in the car. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz asks, "I'm not gonna find anything in the car?" and the complainant responds, "Again, this is not my car." Officer Cuellar De La Cruz replied, "OK, that's not what I asked...that's not what I asked." The complainant responds, "I don't have nothing in the car." The passenger asks a question and says, "it was the taillight now it seems to have just escalated." Officer Cuellar De La Cruz responds, "The plates are expired. I could keep going if you want me to give you all more than three tickets," and "I got more than one probable cause to stop you. Okay, I do. I got more than one probable cause."

The complainant and passenger were detained by unknown additional CPD members, while for approximately 4 minutes and 50 seconds (from the approximately 9 to 13:50 mark), Officers Sanchez and Cuellar De La Cruz both search the inside of the vehicle, including opening the inside console and pulling the back passenger seat down to look inside the trunk; no contraband was recovered during the vehicle search. While searching the vehicle, at the 9:30 mark, Officer Cuellar De La Cruz comments, "They are nervous as fuck." As they continue the search of the vehicle, Officer Cuellar De La Cruz states, "There has to be something in here. That vibe he gave me. That's some bullshit. And then they both start arguing." During this time, the passenger asked for a supervisor, and Officer Cuellar De La Cruz requested one over the radio. After searching the vehicle, the Officers Cuellar De La Cruz and Sanchez went to their squad car to write tickets. Sergeant John Hanlon, Employee #115870, arrived on scene and asked the Officers about the situation.⁴

Officer Cuellar De La Cruz's BWC at the 14:09 mark captures the conversation between Sergeant Hanlon and Officer Cuellar De La Cruz. Sergeant Hanlon asks, "What's going on, man?" Officer Cuellar De La Cruz states that "[the complainant] didn't want to come out" and that the complainant had a broken taillight and expired license plates. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz tells Sergeant Hanlon that the complainant and passenger seemed "a little nervous" and when Officer Cuellar De La Cruz asked them to get out of the vehicle, the complainant asked why. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz tells Sergeant Hanlon that he told the complainant, "I need to talk to you. I go, 'the car's not yours, you're telling me you don't know who the car is, and now you don't know the—now you're telling me it's your mom's, first it was your girlfriend's, now we need to have a conversation.'" Sergeant Hanlon asks Officer Cuellar De La Cruz whether the complainant was able to verify any of the registered owner's information. Officer Cuellar Del La Cruz responds that, "[the complainant] gave me a name, and I found the, like a work ID..." Sergeant Hanlon interrupts and asks whether the complainant was able to verify the name of the registered owner of the car and

⁴ Attachments 1 and 2.

Officer Cuellar De La Cruz states, “Yeah, it comes back to the lady on that picture...” Sergeant Hanlon asks whether the complainant was able to provide that name, and Officer Cuellar De La Cruz states, “Yeah, well, [they] gave me that name, like, after I took [them] out, yeah, [they’re] like, ‘that’s my mom.’” Sergeant Hanlon then states “OK, though that was after giving you several incorrect names” and Officer Cuellar De La Cruz said, “Yeah, yeah. That’s why I took [them] out.”

OIG reviewed the BWC footage, and in contrast to what Officer Cuellar De La Cruz stated to Sergeant Hanlon, Officer Cuellar De La Cruz never asked the complainant about the owner of the car nor did the complainant ever identify any owner of the car prior to Officer Cuellar De La Cruz asking them to step out of the vehicle and searching the vehicle. That is, the BWC footage directly contradicts Officer Cuellar De La Cruz’s statement to Sergeant Hanlon that the complainant’s conflicting statements about the owner of the vehicle prompted Officer Cuellar de La Cruz to ask the complainant and the passenger to exit the car and gave rise to the search of the vehicle.

According to the BWC footage, Officer Cuellar De La Cruz did not ask the complainant about the owner of the vehicle until after the search when Officer Cuellar De La Cruz inquired about how to open the glove compartment before they were about to uncuff the complainant. Specifically, after the vehicle search and after Officer Cuellar De La Cruz’s conversation with Sergeant Hanlon, beginning at the 16:02 mark, Officer Cuellar De La Cruz asks the complainant how to get into the vehicle’s glove compartment and whether the vehicle needs to be on. The complainant states, “I’m not sure. This not my vehicle. I just know it’s a button on the dashboard bro. This is not my vehicle.” For the first time, at the 16:22 mark, Officer Cuellar De La Cruz asks the complainant, “This [car is] your girlfriend’s, your mom’s, who is it?” The complainant says it is their “wife’s car.”

After Officer Cuellar De La Cruz searches the vehicles glove compartment, at the 17:10 mark, the complainant inquires about the probable cause for searching the vehicle and asking them out of the car. Officer Cuellar De La Cruz responds, “searching the vehicle, the way your reaction to questions that I was asking you,” that the complainant was acting “nervous as hell, and when I asked you certain questions, you were not providing me with the right answers,” “and when I asked you to step out of the vehicle you were giving me a hard time, which that made you more suspicious more red flags . . .” The complainant turns to Sergeant Hanlon and asks, “that makes sense to you?” Sergeant Hanlon says that it does and that, “you weren’t able to give some information verifying...” Officer Cuellar De La Cruz then tells the complainant, “I asked you to verify, for the vehicle, first it was your girlfriend’s, then it was your mom’s...” The complainant responds, “I never said any of that, the only thing I said was that it’s not my vehicle...you just asked me that right now...now you’re lying, he’s lying...”

The BWC footage supports the complainant’s assertion that Officer Cuellar De La Cruz lied about asking about the car’s owner before asking them out of the vehicle and conducting a search of the vehicle. The complainant mentioned that the car was not their vehicle multiple times without further details. Prior to the search, whenever the complainant mentioned that the car was not their car, Officer Cuellar De La Cruz never asked follow-up questions about the car’s specific owner or the car owner’s name, nor did the complainant state any specific owner or name. Further, after searching the vehicle, when Officer Cuellar De La Cruz did ask who the car belonged to, the complainant provided only one answer and said it was their “wife’s car” – not their girlfriend’s or mom’s, as Officer Cuellar De La Cruz had previously stated to Sergeant Hanlon.⁵

⁵ Attachments 1 and 2.

In COPA's Final Summary Report (FSR) Closure Memo, COPA wrote that the Officers explained to Sergeant Hanlon their basis for the stop and detainment: "the broken taillight, expired license plates, both [the complainant] and [the passenger's] overall nervous demeanor and their reluctance to exit the vehicle, the fact [the complainant] was not the registered owner of the car, and the discovery of [the passenger's] active warrant."⁶ COPA, however, failed to address that Officer Cuellar De La Cruz's provided an apparently false statement regarding the justification for taking the complainant out of the vehicle and searching it.

If in fact Officer Cuellar De La Cruz lied to Sergeant Hanlon in justifying the removal of the complainant and the warrantless search of the vehicle, this would constitute important misconduct. However, COPA failed to address the apparent discrepancy between the statements made by Officer Cuellar De La Cruz to Sergeant Hanlon and what was captured on BWC footage. OIG reviewed COPA's investigative file and the BWC footage, and has set forth quotes of Officer Cuellar De La Cruz's words. OIG notes, nonetheless, that the sequence of events and the context for Officer De La Cruz's statement may best be understood by reviewing the BWC footage in its entirety.

Based on OIG's preliminary review, and without taking any position on any other aspect of the investigation or its findings, OIG recommends that COPA reopen this investigation to address Officer Cuellar De La Cruz's false statements made to Sergeant Hanlon and if those statements constitute a Rule 14 violation.

Please contact Chief Investigative Analyst LaDonna Candia-Flanagan at lcandia-flanagan@igchicago.org or (773) 478-5614 with any questions. Please send your response to this recommendation within the time allowed by MCC § 2-56-245. OIG will consider a failure to respond in the time permitted by ordinance to be a declination of our recommendation. OIG looks forward to COPA's response and recommends that COPA incorporate this letter and its response into the electronic case file to provide for a complete record.

Respectfully,



Tobara Richardson
Deputy Inspector General for Public Safety
Office of Inspector General

cc: Deborah Witzburg, Inspector General, OIG
Samuel Chae, Associate General Counsel, OIG
LaDonna Candia-Flanagan, Chief Investigative Analyst for Public Safety, OIG
Robin Murphy, General Counsel, COPA
Angela Snell, Chief Investigative Law Officer, COPA
Yolanda Talley, Chief, Bureau of Internal Affairs, CPD

⁶ Attachment 47.

Appendix B | Department Response



Outlook

RE: Recommendation to Reopen Log #2022-0005027-Currently in CCR

From Angela Snell <Angela.Snell@chicagocopa.org>

Date Wed 9/18/2024 2:37 PM

To LaDonna Candia-Flanagan <lcandia-flanagan@igchicago.org>; Andrea Kersten <Andrea.Kersten@chicagocopa.org>

Cc Robin Murphy <Robin.Murphy@chicagocopa.org>; Yolanda Talley <yolanda.talley@chicagopolice.org>; Tobara Richardson <trichardson@igchicago.org>; Samuel Chae <schae@igchicago.org>; Deborah Witzburg <dwitzburg@igchicago.org>

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Good afternoon, COPA will re-open this log. Please let me know of any questions.

Best,

Angie Snell (she/they)
Assistant General Counsel
Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA)
1615 W. Chicago Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622
Office: 312-746-0186
Cell: 312-965-2025

From: LaDonna Candia-Flanagan <lcandia-flanagan@igchicago.org>

Sent: Thursday, August 15, 2024 9:07 AM

To: Angela Snell <Angela.Snell@chicagocopa.org>; Andrea Kersten <Andrea.Kersten@chicagocopa.org>

Cc: Robin Murphy <Robin.Murphy@chicagocopa.org>; Yolanda Talley <yolanda.talley@chicagopolice.org>; Tobara Richardson <trichardson@igchicago.org>; Samuel Chae <schae@igchicago.org>; Deborah Witzburg <dWitzburg@igchicago.org>

Subject: RE: Recommendation to Reopen Log #2022-0005027-Currently in CCR

[Warning: External email]

Good Morning-

Your request has been received and we look forward to your response.

LaDonna Candia-Flanagan
Chief Investigative Analyst-Public Safety
City of Chicago | Office of Inspector General
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lcandia-flanagan@igchicago.org
(773) 478-5614

From: Angela Snell <Angela.Snell@chicagocopa.org>

Sent: Thursday, August 15, 2024 8:13 AM

To: LaDonna Candia-Flanagan <lcandia-flanagan@igchicago.org>; Andrea Kersten <Andrea.Kersten@chicagocopa.org>

Cc: Robin Murphy <Robin.Murphy@chicagocopa.org>; Yolanda Talley <yolanda.talley@chicagopolice.org>; Tobar Richardson <trichardson@igchicago.org>; Samuel Chae <schae@igchicago.org>; Deborah Witzburg <dwitzburg@igchicago.org>

Subject: RE: Recommendation to Reopen Log #2022-0005027-Currently in CCR

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Good morning, COPA requests an additional 30 days to respond to this request. Please let me know of any questions.

Best,

Angie Snell (she/they)
Assistant General Counsel
Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA)
1615 W. Chicago Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622
Office: 312-746-0186
Cell: 312-965-2025

From: LaDonna Candia-Flanagan <lcandia-flanagan@igchicago.org>

Sent: Tuesday, June 18, 2024 11:03 AM

To: Andrea Kersten <Andrea.Kersten@chicagocopa.org>

Cc: Angela Snell <Angela.Snell@chicagocopa.org>; Robin Murphy <Robin.Murphy@chicagocopa.org>; Yolanda Talley <yolanda.talley@chicagopolice.org>; Tobar Richardson <trichardson@igchicago.org>; Samuel Chae <schae@igchicago.org>; Deborah Witzburg <dWitzburg@igchicago.org>

Subject: Recommendation to Reopen Log #2022-0005027-Currently in CCR

[Warning: External email]

Dear Andrea Kersten:

On behalf of Deputy Inspector General Tobar Richardson, please find attached to this email a letter of recommendation to reopen Log # 2022-0005027. This investigation is currently in CCR. Please acknowledge your receipt of this correspondence and let me know if you have any questions.

LaDonna Candia-Flanagan

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LaDonna Candia-Flanagan

Chief Investigative Analyst for Public Safety

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For further information about this report, please contact the City of Chicago Office of Inspector General, 231 S. LaSalle Street, 12th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604, or visit our website at igchicago.org.

Talk to Us

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